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WHAT IS LAND USE PLANNING?

A Radio talk by Dr. L. C. Gray, Chief, Land Policy Section, Division of Program Planning, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, broadcast in the Conservation Day program, National Farm and Home Hour, Friday, January 25, 1935, by 60 stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company.

Friends of the Radio Audience:

The word "planning" is being used so much in connection with New Deal policies that it is in danger of becoming hackneyed, like a very popular song which is sung so often that we finally shut off the radio as soon as we hear it. Not a few people, also, are frankly alarmed at what they conceive planning to be. It is associated in their minds with the five-year plan of the Soviets or the programs of other European dictatorships. It has conjured up visions of so-called regimentation, implying that the American people are to be subjected to a sort of economic and social goose stepping.

The democratic conception of planning, however, which is being developed in the United States is widely different from the conception applied by some of the European dictatorships. In the latter the exaltation of a nation is made the end and aim of planning. Men work and fight and women bear children for the primary purpose of enhancing the power of the state and preserving the particular outfit that happens to control the government. The democratic conception proposes to restrict individual liberty only in the interest of the general welfare. It is interested not in exalting the Nation as such, except in so far as this may serve the purpose of advancing the welfare of its citizens. Planning constitutes the attempt of the American people to find a middle ground between capitalism and an extreme form of socialism.

My honored teacher and friend, Professor Richard T. Ely, has coined the phrase "under all the land". It emphasizes the fact that land planning is basic to nearly all other aspects of planning. This idea was expressed by President Roosevelt yesterday in transmitting to Congress the Report of the National Resources Board. The President said, "We seek to use our natural resources not as a thing apart but as something that is interwoven with industry, labor, finance, taxation, agriculture, homes, recreation, good citizenship. The results of this interweaving will have a greater influence on the future American standard of living than all the rest of our economics put together".

Some opponents would have us believe that the economic and social planning of the New Deal consists in the centralization of control in a Federal bureaucracy. On the contrary, what is taking place is a vast extension of cooperation for the general good in which an increasing number of our citizens are coming to play a part.

This is particularly true of the new movement for land planning. In very large measure objectives in land-use planning are primarily local, and concern the Nation largely because the welfare of the whole is a reflection of the social health and welfare of the parts. Of immediate interest to rural communities are such objectives in land planning as landscape preservation and beautification;

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provision for growth and upkeep of forests that have a vital connection with local employment, industry, and agriculture; development of adequate local recreational areas; reservation and protection of areas useful for local water supply, preventing the wastage of soil resources that constitute the essential basis of the community's existence; removing stranded families from lands wholly unsuited to their use; providing for the adequate protection and utilization of extensive areas of tax-delinquent land; directing future land settlement to areas adapted to the purpose and, on the other hand, discouraging settlement in unsuitable areas.

You will also recognize that the steps taken with reference to these and other phases of land planning will be vitally connected with the making of plans for a logical distribution of schools, roads, and power lines, a better and more economical organization of county government, and the development of a closer connection between employment on farms and employment in local forest, mines, and industries.

We have long had a certain amount of collective planning with reference to land, mostly with reference to land in public ownership, as for instance, Federal and State forest, parks, and game refuges. Much the larger and more important part of our land, however, is now in private ownership, much of it interspersed with land in public ownership. It is obvious that there can be no adequate planning for the wise use and conservation of our land resources unless the planning applies also to the privately owned lands.

This does not imply that the government proposes to dictate to the private landowner how he shall use his land. Land planning aims first at determining what use of the land will be most advantageous to the general welfare. Sometimes there may need to be no change at all in the method of use. In many cases the best use for all of us may also be for the best interest of the private landowner. Those acquainted with land problems, however, recognize innumerable points at which the interest of the landowner and the general welfare are essentially in conflict. We have long permitted the public interest in land use to be sacrificed to private profit. Land-use planning is undertaken on the assumption that the welfare of the Nation and the community in the use of our land resources, which are the foundation of national welfare, present and future, must be maintained.

American courts have upheld some regulation of land use in the form of zoning for cities, and it may be that a certain amount of regulation of land use in the country would also be held reasonable. On the whole, however, we shall make most progress toward better land use if we recognize that we should not compel landowners to use their lands in ways necessary for the general welfare when this means serious financial loss to the individual. The Nation disposed of its most valuable lands to private individuals with practically no limitations on mode of use. If it now seems necessary to bring about a better use of these lands, it will probably be wise either to repay the landowner in some manner for any serious loss that he suffers thereby or to repurchase some of the land and manage it for the general welfare.

In the brief time available today I have undertaken to give you only a very general idea of the nature and aims of land use planning. Future broadcasts in this series will present some of the numerous conditions that emphasize the need for land use planning and the steps that are proposed in the Land Report of the

National Resources Board to deal with these conditions.

Many of the policies of the New Deal are frankly temporary measures to meet an emergency, but land policies and planning are in the nature of permanent reforms. Both of the great political parties, in their national platforms, have agreed that the time has arrived for the development of a new land policy. While there may be differences in detail, there is no difference as to the recognition of the need; and therefore we may say confidently that land use planning will occupy a central place in our national life.

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